

Canyon Highway — No. 7

Agencies Cooperate in Effort To Preserve the Scenic Values

By JOSEPHINE ZIMMERMAN

In February, 1968, four agencies (Provo Chamber of Commerce, Utah County Commission, Provo City Corp., and Wasatch County Commission) directed a letter to the Utah Highway Department, U.S. Forest Service, and Utah Fish and Game Department asking them to give careful study to seven requests and to "abide by them as closely as possible in planning the Provo Canyon highway."

The requests, in capsule form, included: (1) That the highway department design and construct a highway that will enhance rather than detract from the canyon scenery, and that consideration be given "to all human values desired from the canyon."

(2) That the developed recreation areas and undeveloped areas with recreation

potential remain highly accessible from the main highway.

(3) That construction interfere as little as possible with the natural river bed, since Provo River provides more fishing than any other Utah river, and fishing waters, if destroyed, cannot be replaced.

(4) That adequate lookout points be planned for the numerous scenic views.

(5) That the canyon's unique geographic and geologic formations be protected and remain visible and accessible from the highway.

(6) That the agencies cooperate in prohibiting construction of unsightly establishments and advertisements along the highway and keep structures in harmony with the surrounding landscape.

(7) That the Forest Service and Fish and Game Department, having strong interests in the canyon and insight into the

needs and interests of the people, keep in close touch with the highway department, and
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LOWER CANYON RECREATION AREAS such as Canyon Glen, shown across the old railroad bridge, have been preserved to a

large extent through revised highway plans, according to Provo City and Utah County officials.

Canyon Highway

Strong Effort Made to Preserve Scenic and Recreational Values

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that all coordinate their efforts to provide the people with a better highway for travel and also a more beautiful and useful Provo Canyon.

In June, 1969, a year and a half later, Clarence Thornock, supervisor of the Uinta National Forest, sent a progress report on a coordinated study by the agencies of the lower Provo Canyon highway project. While congratulating the four governmental bodies "on giving meaningful guidance in planning this highway project," the letter indicated that "with the design criteria given, it is difficult to meet some of your recommendations."

He indicated that some tentative changes in the preliminary alignment had been made, but stated "While we agree on general principles, we are having difficulty with significant details on the upper end of the project."

"There is such a concentrated complex of recreation sites, scenic overlooks, geological formations, and fishing waters

located in a critical 4½-mile section of this canyon that we should request a modification of the design criteria for the section from Nunns to a point one quarter mile above the Alpine Loop junction," Mr. Thornock's letter continued. He recommended that this section be taken out of the limited access category and developed for four lanes of traffic, plus a center lane in lieu of a center median, pointing out that it would "greatly enhance the developed recreation areas close to the highway" and make them "highly accessible to the public."

Emphasizing that "suitable recreation sites are at a premium in this magnificent canyon," Mr. Thornock presented an alternate road plan which would provide for more fully-developed commercial facilities and public recreation sites to serve the traveling public. They further recommended a reduction in speed from 60 to 45 miles per hour, as well as changing the design criteria with vertical bin walls

and guard rails to "help keep the proposed highway out of several important fishing holes."

The letter also recommended development of the old railroad right-of-way into an excellent bridal path and fisherman's trail from Rotary Park to the trestle.

Members of the Provo City Commission reported this week that during months of negotiations, the highway department had been "most cooperative in meeting our requests ... within limits." Those limits included the Road Commission's decision to build a limited access freeway, and the limits imposed by the canyon itself.

The Utah County Commission also stressed the highway department's cooperative attitude. Commissioner Paul Thorn declared, "The alignment we now have in the lower canyon is a far different road from the plan which was first presented to us."

Lavern D. Green, Utah County Surveyor, stated "We have been able to save most of the recreation areas in the lower canyon for the enjoyment of the

public, and have insured that they can be reached by way of a safe road which will be free of dangerous thru traffic."

The present canyon road will revert to Utah County when the new road is completed, and the Utah County Commissioners affirmed that they will maintain it as a good access road to the recreation areas.

Concerning the higher section of the canyon, Commissioner Thorn emphasized, "We have told the Road Commission that we don't want any chute carrying the traffic from Heber City to Provo." He pointed out that no definite road plan has yet been presented for the upper portion of the road, but said the Utah County Coordinating Council, the Council of Governments, and other agencies will continue to work closely with the highway department in getting the best alignment possible.

Mr. Thornock declared that while the decision to build a freeway had eliminated plans for the scenic road, he felt the highway department had made many changes and concessions which are desirable. He also pointed out that the speed on the new highway is being planned for 50 miles per hour, rather than the original 60, which will be beneficial for sightseers. This lower speed limit was confirmed by Bert Taylor, pre-construction engineer.